



Case Study



Towards Translation Practices in Traditional Chinese Medicine from the Perspective of Skopos Theory: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an integral part of China's cultural heritage. Most existing studies focus on the translation of ancient TCM texts into foreign languages, while there is scarce research on translating the works of foreign scholars into Chinese. Therefore, the current research aimed to facilitate the intracultural translation of Chinese cultural texts originally written in English back into Chinese by examining practical examples from the aforementioned translation.

Methodology: Guided by the Skopos Theory, the present study analyzes and discusses the translation principles and techniques utilized in the Chinese version of *88 Chinese Medicine Secrets* by Angela Hicks, at the lexical, syntactical and discursive levels.

Results: The findings highlight the importance of selecting contextually appropriate terminology to ensure accurate information transmission. Adjustments to sentence structures are necessary to align with the expression habits of the target language. Additionally, context plays a vital role in language comprehension, reflecting a perceptual, experiential, and practical discourse awareness.

Conclusion: To effectively inherit and promote Chinese medicine culture, TCM translators should adhere to the principles of the Skopos Theory—specifically the skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule—throughout the translation process.

1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an essential component of Chinese cultural heritage. Over thousands of years of medical practice, TCM has evolved into a comprehensive and distinct scientific system that serves as an effective means for individuals to prevent and treat illnesses, maintain fitness, and preserve health (Xiang et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2022), and has long garnered global attention, especially in Europe and America. Currently, there is a growing trend of TCM clinical application within society, and as a result, the translation of TCM materials is becoming increasingly important. The ancient Chinese medicine culture is in itself extensive and profound, with TCM books being quite obscure to

understand even in Chinese (Fang & Wu, 2024). TCM translation now confronts a multitude of challenges, rooted in historical and linguistic limitations, as well as distinctive theoretical frameworks. These are notably exemplified by the lack of standardized management in TCM terminology translation, the absence of consistent translation principles, and the scarcity of systematic research into translation theories (Li & Kuang, 2018), among other issues. For instance, Chinese medicine is oftentimes viewed as an “alternative therapy” within the Western perspective, characterized by its naturalistic, holistic, and human-centered approach, which contrasts with biomedicine. This particular form of medicine needs



to be mastered through practice, resulting in Western translators sometimes overlooking terminological precision (Gao et al., 2024).

Based on the analysis of TCM translation research papers published in the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) journals between 2000 and 2020, it is observed that the research in this field adhered to the conventional paradigm of translation studies, emphasizing qualitative analysis of translations, including the critical analysis and discussion of the principles and strategies of TCM translation (Zhan & Jin, 2021). Zhang and Zhu's (2023) research enhanced our comprehension of the translation methodologies utilized by Lockhart and Kerr in their renditions of *Da Sheng Bian*, a seminal text in TCM obstetrics, with a particular emphasis on the lexical, syntactic, and discursive dimensions. However, most of the existing studies focus on the translation of classical Chinese medical writings into foreign languages, and there is a dearth of studies on the translator's strategies and skills in translating foreign scholars' writings into Chinese. To disseminate TCM knowledge to enthusiasts of Chinese medicine, translating English TCM books into Chinese is also of paramount significance. This can assist readers in learning about important basic concepts, thoughts, and principles of TCM from the angle of foreign experts and enrich TCM translation research while facilitating the inheritance and dissemination of TCM knowledge and promoting cultural exchanges between China and the West.

Guided by the Skopos Theory, the present paper sets out to present Western research on Traditional Chinese Medicine through the translation of an English book titled "88 Chinese Medicine Secrets", and to summarize the translation strategies for cultural back-translation of TCM English, thereby shedding light on the communication and dissemination of TCM culture.

2. Theoretical Framework

Skopos Theory introduces a fresh approach to translation theory, one that is centered on human actions. It characterizes translation as an intercultural exchange process that is driven by distinct objectives and aims (An & Sun, 2022). Its fundamental guiding principle posits that the purpose of the translation process, from initiation to completion, is the most critical element. According to the Skopos Theory, the aim of translation shapes the strategies and methods employed.

The theoretical development has experienced four stages and four representative figures have emerged in history. In the first stage, Katharina Reiss proposed a functional category of translation criticism that emphasized textual equivalence and advocated the

combination of text types, textual functions, and translation strategies (Reiss, 2004). The second stage is the Skopos Theory and beyond put forward by Hans J. Vermeer based on Reiss's textual function theory, who believed that the purpose of translation determined the whole process and methods of translation (Vermeer & Andrew, 1998). He put forward the coherence rule and the fidelity rule in translation. The third stage is Justa Holz Manttari's theory of translation action, as Manttari believed that translation and the translation action were different, as the latter was arguably complex, including the initiator of the translation action, the original author, the translator of the target language, the recipient of the target language and other participants. The fourth stage is Christiane Nord's theory of function plus loyalty. Nord perfected the Skopos Theory and advocated that the translator should respect the original text and coordinate the relationship with the original author and initiator (Wang, 2014).

The central tenet of the Skopos Theory posits that every action is driven by a purpose, and the actor selects the most fitting method based on the existing circumstances to attain the desired objectives. Consequently, translation is an intentional act of intercultural communication, and thus the translator should take into account all pertinent factors, guided by the translation's Skopos, to opt for the most suitable approach in translation (Zhang, 2005).

In the theoretical framework, the Skopos rule takes precedence, indicating that translators should tailor their strategies and methods to align with the expectations of the target audience, thereby optimizing communicative effectiveness. The theory encompasses two additional principles: coherence and fidelity. The coherence rule stipulates that the translation must adhere to the standard of intratextual coherence, ensuring that it is comprehensible to the readers and resonates with the cultural and communicative context of the target language. The fidelity rule implies that there should be intertextual coherence between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). This concept of fidelity is akin to the notion of faithfulness to the original text found in other translation theories. However, Skopos rule stipulates that the translator's interpretation of the source text and the intended purpose of the translation dictate the extent and manner of this faithfulness (Vermeer & Andrew, 1998). As the paramount principle, the Skopos rule supersedes both coherence and fidelity rules. Consequently, to effectively achieve the objectives of translation, translators must choose strategies flexibly in line with the anticipated functions of the translated text.

3. Methodology

The book "88 Chinese Medicine Secrets" authored by Hicks (2016), who is a British medical practitioner

and professor, offers effective guidance on Traditional Chinese Medicine through everyday life and health habits to assist individuals in maintaining health. It is rich in content and presented with vivid and concise language.

The translation practice primarily employs translation strategies grounded in the Skopos Theory, analyzing and discussing the principal translation principles and techniques utilized in the TCM translation at the lexical, syntactical, and discourse levels, in accordance with the previous studies (e.g., Chen & Zheng, 2018; Károly, 2012). By examining practical examples, we seek to facilitate the intracultural translation of cultural texts originally written in English back into Chinese, throwing some light on understanding Chinese medicine, TCM terminology, and TCM culture at large. In order to ensure the accuracy of our analysis, we referred to the System for Chinese-English Terminology of Chinese Medicine and consulted TCM translation professionals and other reliable sources (e.g., classical Chinese medicine books, TCM practitioners, etc.) on some important aspects.

The most significant challenge for translators is arguably to achieve both semantic and formal fidelity in TCM works, which directly impacts the successful expression of specific TCM terms and cultural concepts. Moreover, it is imperative to surmount the challenges of cultural transmission, such as variation and misinterpretation, to inherit and promote the essence of traditional Chinese culture (Liang, 2013).

4. Results

Translation at the lexical level

TCM English embodies the linguistic and cultural attributes of both English and Chinese. To ensure the accuracy of TCM translation, it is necessary to ensure the correct translation of vocabulary, which is the smallest semantic unit in translation. The English vocabulary of TCM is very specialized in medicine and has the characteristic of polysemy. Common words also have specific meanings in different collocations and contexts (Zhang & Dong, 2020). Leveraging the unique lexical TCM English and the mechanisms established through translation, the translation of terms can be executed via transliteration, semantic translation, phonological semantic translation, and interpretive translation. Rational selections can be made in accordance with the Skopos rule, tailored to the specific contexts.

Translation of TCM terminology

In October 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Western Pacific Region issued the WHO International Standard Terminologies of Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region. This

standard represents a significant advancement in the standardization of TCM terminology translation. At the same time, this standard also contributes to the promotion and application of traditional medicine, including TCM, in the world, so it is called by insiders as a 'milestone in the development of traditional medicine' (Pritzker and Hui, 2014). However, from the perspective of discipline development, this international terminology standard is not static. WHO officials said that in future practices, the standard will be constantly revised and improved so that the term translation can reflect the culture of TCM more accurately.

In practical application, the translator chooses the most appropriate words for translation according to terminology standards and context (Cheng & Sin, 2008), to achieve the purpose of correct terminology usage and accurate information transmission (see Table 1). In the process of translation, the application of inaccurate terms in the source text was corrected, and the terms that were not in the international standard were checked and confirmed through multiple sources of information, so as to select words that are faithful to the original meaning and easy to understand, ensuring a correct, coherent and intelligible translation of the TCM source text.

Table 1.

TCM Terminology

English	Chinese
Yin	阴
Yang	阳
Premature Ageing	早衰
Dantien	丹田
Point	穴位
Acupuncture	针灸
Qigong	气功
Do the Month	坐月子
Tai Ji Quan	太极拳
Gua Sha	刮痧
Tuina (Massage)	推拿
Facial Diagnosis	面相
Classic of a Simple Girl	《素女经》
Nei Jing/Yellow Emperors' Classic of Internal Medicine	《内经》/《黄帝内经》
Viscera/Internal Organs	脏腑
Heart, Liver, Spleen, Lung, Kidney	心、肝、脾、肺、肾
Brain, Marrow, Bone, Vessel, Gall Bladder	脑、髓、骨、脉、胆

Translation of synonymy

Since certain English words can only convey a portion of a TCM concept, the same TCM concept may be expressed in various forms depending on the context.

Example 1

ST: jing/essence; qi/chi/energy; shen/spirit

TT: 精; 气; 神

Analysis: Many different expressions in English

correspond to the same concept in the TCM language. In example 1, the term 'jing' and 'essence' both mean "精", and the same thing is true for "气" and "神". In English, different words are often used for expressing the same thing to avoid repetition, while the same thing in Chinese is usually not written in more than one way. Hence during the process of translation, the translator translated English words with the same meaning into a constant Chinese word to achieve the purpose of communication and make the translation conform to the reading preferences of Chinese readers.

Example 2

ST: deficiency of blood; physical weakness

TT: 血虚; 体虚

Analysis: In example 2, 'deficiency of blood' means insufficiency of blood vitality, and 'physical weakness' means poor health. 'Deficiency' and 'weakness' can both be expressed as "虚" in TCM terms. The translator first made clear what the word refers to, and then chose suitable words in TCM to express the original meaning concisely.

Translation of Polysemy

The same word may also have different meanings in different contexts due to polysemy and overlapping concepts in TCM English.

Example 3

ST: cold/cool/neutral/warm/hot food;

cold/damp/dryness/heat/wind weather

TT: 寒性/凉性/平性/温性/热性食物; 寒/湿/燥/火/风气(候)

Analysis: Cold food refers to food with the functions of clearing heat, purging fire, cooling blood, and detoxifying. And as a nature of food, 'cold' is translated into "寒性". When 'cold' is applied as an exogenous cause of climate, it is translated into "寒" or "寒气" "寒邪" depending on the circumstances, meaning low temperature.

Example 4

ST: anger, fear, grief, joy, sadness, worry, shock

We may feel grief when a relationship ends.

A good laugh makes you ten years younger, while worry turns the hair grey.

TT: 怒、恐、忧、喜、悲、思、惊

当感情结束时, 我们可能会感到悲伤。

笑一笑十年少, 愁一愁白了头。

Analysis: In this example, grief is "忧" in the fixed expression of the seven emotions, but in the sentence describing a feeling about a particular event, it is semantically translated as "悲伤". Worry, in the same way, is translated as "愁一愁" in rhymes according to

the meaning and corresponding format, while in fixed expressions it means "思".

Translation of phrases

One of the most representative of TCM language is a large number of phrases with rigorous structure and rich connotation, which account for a large proportion and have particularly significant characteristics. The grammatical relations among its internal components are also very complex.

Example 5

ST: harmonize qi and blood

TT: 调和气血

Analysis: Four-character terms are generally used in Chinese to express phrases. In Example 5, 'harmonize qi and blood' are composed of the predicate and the object, and the components are the domination and the dominant. It is translated into "调和气血" by omitting the conjunction in translation.

Example 6

ST: dissipate cold and dispel dampness

TT: 散寒祛湿

Analysis: A coordinated phrase consists of two or more parts that have equal grammatical status. The most common in TCM is a parallel and progressive relationship, such as 'dissipate cold and dispel dampness', which is also to remove the conjunction and reduce the verb and noun into one single word. It is translated as "散寒祛湿". In this way, the translation can be catchy and conform to the cultural characteristics of TCM.

Translation at the syntactic level

Significant differences exist between English and Chinese in terms of syntax, vocabulary, rhetoric, and other aspects, which means syntactic translation will inevitably encounter numerous challenges. The translator transforms the sentence elements, sentence patterns, and voice in the original sentence so that the translated text conforms to the target language's expression mode, method, and habit. In sentence formation, the subject, predicate, object, and attribute can be exchanged. From the perspective of sentence pattern, complex sentences can become compound sentences, and the converse is also true. Connectives, personal pronouns, and other components can be added or deleted as appropriate to suit the habits of the target language readers and to keep the translation coherent. TCM English also has the characteristics of medical English, and the passive voice can be used in a wide range of cases. While the passive voice is commonly used in Chinese, often through the use of the words "把" or "被", its range of application is significantly

narrower than that of the passive voice in English. Consequently, in many instances, the English passive voice is translated into an active construction.

Translation of indirect description

Indirect description refers to the author's paraphrase of the specific description or plot in the TCM text. These descriptions do not quote the sentences in the original TCM classic books, but the statements were written by the author to prove the thesis of the article. The translation of indirect description follows the principle of domestication. Considering that the intended readers of the original text are positioned as those who are interested in TCM research in China and have a certain understanding of TCM knowledge, the domestication strategy is adopted to convey the content of the original text.

Example 7

ST: One tells of a Chinese man who sold vegetables and carried them on a pole that rested on his shoulders. He developed a hunched back at 12 and was nicknamed 'the hunchbacked vegetable boy'. He later learned Chinese boxing—a martial art where concentration on the dantien is practised. He eventually straightened his back.

TT: 其中一个故事讲的是一个挑担卖菜的中国人。12岁时他得了驼背，于是人们给他起了个外号叫“驼背菜童”。他后来学习了太极拳，终于挺直了背。

Analysis: In this example, 'the hunchbacked vegetable boy' is translated to “驼背菜童”. The aim of using the domestication strategy is to express and reflect the national characteristics and linguistic style of the target group, while preserving the sentiment of the original work for target readers. According to the Skopos Theory, the translation needs to play a role in the context and culture of the target language depending on the way the target language recipient expects. Therefore, since Chinese readers can easily understand the meaning of Tai Chi Chuan in the annotated 'Chinese Boxing' in the original text, the translator omitted the explanation of 'Chinese Boxing' in the original text, making the meaning of the sentence clear and concise.

Translation of direct speech

There are four types of TCM cultural translation in this book, namely, proper nouns, conceptual terms, direct speech, and indirect description (Li & Shi, 2008). There are different translation strategies for different situations. The translation of these cultural implications all follows three rules, namely Skopos, coherence, and fidelity rules. Hence, the translation of direct speech in the original text follows the method of quoting sentences from the original TCM texts, while the translation of indirect descriptions

follows the strategy of domestication.

Example 8

ST: Anger makes qi rise, fear makes qi descend, worry knots the qi, grief, and sadness dissolve qi, and joy slows qi down.

TT: 怒则气上，恐则气下，思则气结，悲则气消，喜则气缓。

Analysis: This sentence is a direct quotation from the TCM book Su Wen, which is relatively famous and well-known to the public. Moreover, the meaning of the cited text is not difficult to understand, so the translator directly quoted the sentence in the TCM classic book to retain the Chinese cultural connotation. At the same time, it is convenient for readers to leave a deep impression on the concept and terms of TCM, so as to achieve the expected communicative purpose of translation. For this translation practice of a TCM popular science book, the aim is to enlighten the readers.

Example 9

ST: The most famous Chinese medicine classic, the Nei Jing, written 2,000 years ago, says: 'Heavy and greasy food causes a change that may induce illness.'

TT: 两千年前，著名的中医典籍《内经》写道：“高粱之变，足生大丁，受如持虚。”（意为：食用过多肥厚油腻的食物，不但会使人患上疔疮类皮肤疾病，还会使人像拿空的容器装东西一样容易罹患其他疾病。）

Analysis: This sentence is a direct speech from the classic Chinese medicine book Nei Jing, but the original quotation is ancient medical writings in classical style with not commonly used expression, which is difficult for the majority of target readers to understand. Since the purpose of this translation is to inspire readers' understanding of TCM, the translator added an explanation after quoting the direct speech from Nei Jing to explain the vernacular meaning of the sentence, facilitating readers' understanding. At the same time, whether Nei Jing is 'the most famous' classic of TCM is still in doubt. In order to avoid misleading readers, the translator changed 'the most famous' into 'famous' in translation as “著名”.

Translation of passive sentences

In TCM English, the passive voice is more commonly used to describe objective facts. However, the Chinese language extensively uses the active sentence structure to elaborate, paying attention to the objective facts and emphasizing the things described, which conforms to the Chinese expression habit, with a clear structure and meaning. Therefore, in the process of translation, the passive voice should

be transformed into the active one to enable readers to read and understand smoothly.

Example 10

ST: It is laid down when we are conceived and it creates our underlying strength and vitality.

TT: 它创造了我们内在的力量与活力, 从母亲孕育我们时就存在。

Analysis: The passive voice is often used in English, especially medical English, but rarely used in Chinese sentences. In the process of translation, the translator needs to translate part of the passive sentences into active sentences to conform to the Chinese expression habit. At the same time, the translator also needs to find appropriate Chinese vocabulary to keep the information faithful and the translation concise. In the examples above, the translator translated 'is laid down' as "存在" according to free translation in the active voice, because in Chinese we don't use the expression as "制定" or "放下" for jing, which is the subject 'it' of this sentence refers to. And the meaning of this sentence is actually that jing exists from the conception of us, so "存在" is a proper translation for 'is laid down'. In addition, we hardly use the expression "被存在" because "存在" in Chinese expresses a non-passive state. So, we put it in the active voice. The same is true for 'are conceived', since the Skopos of the translation is to meet the reader's communicative expectations. The proper word amplification like adding "母亲" to change the passive voice can help Chinese readers understand the translation more smoothly without affecting the original meaning.

Example 11

ST: Constitutional essence is stored in the Kidneys and is responsible for the cycles that allow us to grow, reproduce and develop.

TT: 肾藏精, 主生长、发育和生殖。

Analysis: If the translator directly followed the original structure, the first half of the sentence would have been translated as "精被储存在肾中". In TCM, 'constitutional essence' refers to the origin of human life, which is the most basic substance that constitutes and maintains human activities. The active voice was not used in the English original text because who stored constitutional essence in the Kidneys did not need to be known, let alone a complicated and ambiguous definition involved. Or else a different verb would be needed because the constitutional essence couldn't store itself. Thus, the passive voice in English avoided the trouble of interpretation. However, in Chinese expressions, we are very used to omitting the expression of personal pronouns, so the expression "肾藏精" does not need

to explain too many complex concepts, and can convey the meaning. This will allow the readers to understand smoothly. At the same time, replacing the phrase "在...中" with a single word "藏" not only conforms to the Chinese reading and speaking habits but also is very simple and clear, which accords with the characteristics of the Chinese medicine language. In addition, the translator omitted the meaning of 'allow' in the translation process, because in this way, the concept can be expressed more accurately without changing the meaning of the original text. For 'Kidneys', the translator translated this word as "肾" rather than "肾脏", because in TCM, "肾" and "脏" are rarely put together, and represent two different concepts respectively, which should be distinguished from 'kidneys' in general medicine expression in English.

Translation of long and complex sentences

In TCM English, long and complex sentences account for a large proportion and have strict logical connections. During the translation into Chinese, the translator paid attention to its logical connection and converted it into sentences with a loose structure, multiple layers, and a heavy parataxis nature.

Example 12

ST: If you are depleted and unwell this can enable you to gain the strength you need in order to make lifestyle changes that can support your health in the future.

TT: 如果你感到疲惫不适, 中医可以使你获得改变生活方式所需的力量, 以便在未来保持健康。

Analysis: Due to the characteristics of language, long and complex sentences, which include different grammatical relations and specific sentence patterns, often appear in English. Many long and complex sentences are characterized by postpositive attributive clauses. Extended postpositive attributives can be complex sentences, generally with subordinate clauses or long modifiers. To translate a long and complex sentence well, the translator needs to understand the syntactic structure of the original English text, find out the core meaning of the whole sentence and the meaning of each level, as well as make clear the logical relationship between different layers. In this sentence, the translator adopted the method of linear translation and splitting translation. Since the chronological and logical order of this sentence is similar to the word order of Chinese sentences, it can be translated directly in the order of the original text without obvious changes. Due to the long postpositive attributive 'that can support your health in the future' in this sentence, in line with the Chinese expression habits, the translator separated the postpositive attributive from other modifiers to translate the attributive clause into short sentences

“在未来保持健康”, and appropriately added words “以便” to make it logical and smooth.

Translation at the discourse level

According to the Skopos Theory, translation should be able to play a role in the context and culture of the target language in the expected means by the target language recipient. As noted, the Skopos of the translation is the communicative purpose of it, i.e., the communicative function of the target language for its readers within the social and cultural context of the target language (Venuti, 2001). The context is a perceptual, experiential, and practical discourse consciousness. When the translator engages in TCM translation, the original text should be considered as a whole. The translator analyzed and understood the text structure first before analyzing the cohesion between sentences and paragraphs as well as the coherence of logical thinking, to get the main idea of the whole text, and the role of sentences and words in expressing the overall meaning of the text. This can help achieve the translation Skopos of an accurate, comprehensive, and barrierless transmission of information in the original text.

Example 13

ST: For the basic qigong standing position, stand with the feet facing forward and shoulder width apart. Bend the knees slightly so that they are unlocked. Relax the hips and lower abdomen and allow the weight to travel down to the arches of the feet. Allow the pelvis to curl slightly forward so that the lower back is straight. Relax the shoulders and neck and let the arms hang loosely at the sides. Keep the head upright and look straight ahead.

TT: 气功的基础站立姿势是, 双脚朝前, 与肩同宽。膝盖稍弯, 膝关节勿锁死。臀部和小腹放松, 体重下移交付于足弓。骨盆向前微曲, 下背部挺直。放松肩膀和脖颈, 手臂松弛垂于身体两侧。头部挺直, 直视前方。

Analysis: TCM texts have typical textual features, that is, lack of linking components, the structure of imperative predicates and parallel phrases are in the majority, and the logical relationship between sentences describing gestures is not very obvious. Since English is a language favoring hypotaxis, the logical relationship between sentences is mainly realized by formal marker words such as conjunctions and adverbs. Therefore, in the process of translation, attention was paid to the cohesion of the text, which can be translated by substitution or omission. In the translation of this example, the translator omitted translations of ‘so that’ in the original text, used the form of four-character expressions like “与肩同宽” and “直视前方”, and removed several verbs and connectives that do not

affect the meaning, and do not conform to Chinese expressions like ‘for’, ‘allow’ and ‘let’. This helps ensure its cohesion in the structure and coherence in meaning, and conform to the characteristics of TCM texts and the Chinese reading habits.

Example 14

ST: A large head on a strong broad jaw line is indicative of someone who has been born with a healthy constitution. According to Chinese facial diagnosis, the jaw and lower part of the face relate to the later years of a person's life. This can be used as an approximate guide to how we will fare in old age. A strong jaw indicates that we will have a long life, remain healthy into old age and easily recover from illness. A weak jaw indicates poorer health.

TT: 脑袋大, 下巴宽, 下颌曲线坚毅, 拥有这些特征说明此人天生拥有健康的体质。根据中国的面相学说, 一个人的下巴和脸的下半部分与其晚年境况相关。这可以作为我们预测老年生活情况的一个大致参考。结实的下巴预示着我们将会长寿, 步入老年仍能保持健康, 并且很容易从疾病中康复。而下颌无力则可能意味着健康状况不佳。

Analysis: A complete discourse must be connected in structure and coherent in meaning. Cohesion is the requirement of the surface structure while coherence is the requirement of the deep structure. Cohesion is achieved through lexical and grammatical arrangement, while coherence is achieved through orderly placement of information, and the two are closely related. Textual cohesion in form serves semantic coherence and is the surface form symbol of internal semantic coherence. The paragraph is to describe the physiognomy of a person. The translator changed the order of original sentences, found the logical relationship between the elements in the description, distinguished the primary and secondary relationships of each element, and handled the cohesion of each clause to get the translation that matched the relevant reading habits. According to the logical relationship, the translator changed the order of sentence components and brought forward the features of the face. At the same time, the translator divided the long description of features ‘a large head on a strong broad jaw line’ into three short sentences “脑袋大” “下巴宽” “下颌曲线坚毅”, so that the discourse could be more easily accepted by the readers. In addition, the passive voice is changed by the translator into the active voice, and the attributive clause is divided into separate sentences to maintain semantic coherence in the way of parataxis.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As noted above, the translator consulted the international glossary and employed the literal translation, amplification, and omission techniques to

align with the linguistic preferences of the target audience at the lexical level. This approach seeks to assist readers in accurately comprehending the meaning of TCM terminology (Ye & Zhang, 2017). The literal translation not only conveys the research level and cultural insights of foreign TCM studies but also ensures that key messages are understood correctly. Li (2009) insists on utilizing the domestication strategy, which focuses on the literal translation and paraphrase, and is faithful to the original text to preserve the traditional characteristics of the Chinese culture. The amplification and omission helps achieve the desired effects as well. These strategies resonate with the principles of the Skopos Theory, i.e., adopting appropriate methods to make the target audience understand TCM knowledge thoroughly.

At the syntactic level, passive voice was transformed into the active one by adding or deleting conjunctions, as the passive voice is a fundamental characteristic of TCM English; yet it does not align with the Chinese reading preferences. Meanwhile, the translator used the technique of breaking down long and complicated sentences into shorter, less structured ones. As for this aspect, the domestication strategy is also a wiser option. It is not surprising, therefore, the translator reframed sentences with complex syntactic structures, converting them into those with a looser structure while maintaining semantic coherence, in line with the reading habits of the target readership. As argued by Qiu and Qiu (2019), we should adopt an ethnocentric attitude to make foreign language texts compatible with the cultural values of the language into which they are translated, especially in terms of translating the traditional culture originating from China.

At the discourse level, enhancing the text's coherence involves modifying its content by adding or removing information. The Chinese language tends to rely more on semantic coherence rather than functional words such as conjunctions, and sometimes a literal translation of English logical connectives often results in cumbersome sentences. Therefore, it is crucial to minimize the use of connectives in translation and to link sentences through the implied logic to ensure a smooth translation process. By reordering sentences to align with the cognitive patterns of its readers, the translator can largely improve textual coherence and achieve effective communication. Unlike religious translations (Li, 2019), the TCM translation from English to Chinese should avoid using the foreignization strategy that highlights the foreign culture represented by the original work.

In reality, the translation of TCM continues to encounter several challenges (Gao et al., 2024). The primary issue is the inherent ambiguity of its language. TCM's theoretical framework is deeply entrenched in classical Chinese philosophy, a foundation that not only aligns seamlessly with TCM but also contributes to the

ambiguity and complexity of its language, making it a challenging subject to grasp. Hence, the English translation of TCM texts grapples with the difficulty of precisely conveying philosophical concepts and the associated meanings, leaving the choice of translation strategies open to question. Secondly, cultural barriers pose a significant challenge. The terminology in TCM literature is not only meant to transmit information but also to carry cultural significance (Wu, 2022). The cultural backgrounds of TCM and modern Western medicine are vastly different, and the English expression of TCM concepts may be difficult for Chinese readers to grasp. At times, it is challenging to trace back to the corresponding expressions in TCM (Ozolins et al., 2020), potentially leading to misunderstandings as regards descriptions of treatments and techniques. Thirdly, there is a significant deficiency in the standardization of terminology within the field of TMC. Despite the fact that the fundamental theories and principles of TCM have been introduced and spread globally over a considerable period, the terminology employed in this process has not yet been uniformly standardized. The lack of standardization may lead to confusion and misunderstandings among practitioners and scholars, as different terms may be used to describe the same concept, or the same term may be interpreted in various ways. To address this issue, concerted efforts are needed to establish a universally accepted set of terms and definitions that facilitate clearer understanding and more precise application of TCM principles worldwide.

TCM translation acts as the cornerstone for the global dissemination of Traditional Chinese Medicine as heritage (Zhang et al., 2007; Si et al., 2023). It is essential that translators meticulously apply the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule throughout the translation process to better serve the inheritance and development of the outstanding Chinese medicine culture. Future research endeavors could expand upon this study by exploring the translation strategies utilized in the broader context of translating TCM texts from English or other foreign languages into Chinese.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Authors' contribution

All authors contributed to the research conception and design. Yuxiao Sun organized the data collection and performed the data analysis. Zhonghua Wu drafted the article and revised it critically for important intellectual content. Huili Wang made many constructive comments on the earlier versions. All

authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Ethical consideration

This article does not contain any studies requiring ethical approval.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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